

30 September 2003



The Consular Communiqué

Welcome to Bogotá Ambassador Wood!

Inside this issue:

Transit With/Without a Visa	2
Junior Officer Exchanges	2
National Visa Center	3
Frequently Asked NVC Questions	3
Anti-Fraud Working Group	4
Dual Nationals	4
AMCITS: Register with US	5
Consular Contact	5
Community Service at the Animal Shelter	6

On a brisk, sunny morning last August, William Braucher Wood presented his credentials to President Alvaro Uribe who warmly received him as the new U.S. Ambassador to Colombia. In a statement immediately following the ceremony, Ambassador Wood restated the U.S. commitment to Colombia "in helping the government [of Colombia] extend democratic security, eradicate narco-terrorism, and achieve respect for human rights, peace, prosperity, and the rule of law, throughout Colombia."

Before assuming leadership of the largest U.S. embassy in the world, Ambassador Wood was Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and Acting Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of International Organization Affairs, with responsibility for all aspects of U.S. foreign policy at the United Nations and a number of other multilateral organizations from 1998 to 2002. Immediately before that assignment, Ambassador Wood was Political Counselor at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, where he was the chief U.S. negotiator in the Security Council.

The Ambassador also served in Uruguay, Argentina, El Salvador, and Italy, as part of the U.S. negotiating delegation at the 1992 CSCE Helsinki Summit, and as lead U.S. negotiator at the NATO High Level Task Force on conventional arms control. In Washington, he served on the policy planning staff for Latin America, as a special assistant in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, as an

expert in Latin American Affairs on the staff of the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and on a number of functional and regional desks. His other areas of expertise include multilateral affairs, peacekeeping operations, conventional arms control, economic development, and politico-military affairs.

Soon after his arrival at post, Ambassador Wood visited the Consular Section, one of the largest consular sections of any U.S. embassy worldwide. "Our work in consular affairs represents one of the most visible aspects of the United States in any country, particularly here where demand for visas is one of the highest in the world," Ambassador Wood noted. "Officers here have a challenging job and they are doing it extremely well. I am very excited to be returning to Latin America, particularly as Ambassador of such a high performance post," Ambassador Wood said. "Everyone here has contributed to the success of the mission and I look forward to being part of such a dedicated team."

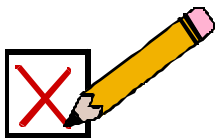
A native of Indiana, Ambassador Wood received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy from Bucknell University in 1973 and a Master of Business Administration degree, with a specialization in international finance, from the George Washington University in 1975. Among the many awards Ambassador Wood received during his 25 years as a foreign service officer are the Department of State's Meritorious and Superior Honor Awards (on several occasions), the James Clement Dunn Award for Excellence for his work at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, and the Distinguished Service Award, the highest award offered by the Department of State.



Ambassador William B. Wood

Attention All U.S. Citizens Resident in Colombia!

The American Citizen Services Registration Drive is in full swing! If you have not registered with us since **August 1, 2002**, **NOW** is the time to do so.



Please see Page 5 for details.

Remember, giving us this information now makes it easier to assist you later.

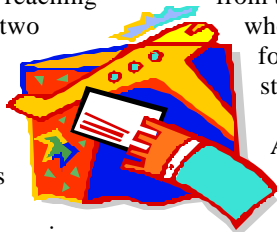
Non-Immigrant Visa Unit

New Procedural Changes - Transit With/Without Visa

The operative word for Nonimmigrant Visa Services for the foreseeable future is change. The events of September 11th highlight the critical role played by immigration and consular officials in safeguarding the nation's borders and preserving national security. They also set into motion far reaching immigration and visa policy changes. The past two years have witnessed a whirlwind of legal, regulatory, and procedural changes in the way we deliver visa services. Whether you have ventured to the United States as a student, as a business executive, as an exchange visitor, or as a tourist, these rapid transitions may have, at times, been frustrating or confusing. We regret any inconvenience travelers may experience. However, these changes will make the U. S. a safer place to visit.

One recent change is the elimination of the Transit Without Visa (TWOV) Program. Effective August 2, 2003, applicants whose travel to their destination requires a change of planes

in the U.S. are now required to have transit visas. This is nothing new to Colombian citizens, as the TWOV program for Colombia ended in 2001. Furthermore, this change will not effect legal permanent residents of the U.S. and citizens from the 27 visa waiver countries. (A list of the countries who participate in the Visa Waiver Program can be found on the Department of State's website (www.state.gov)).



All other third country nationals (TCNS) in Colombia now need a visa to transit the United States. To apply for a visa, TCNS must follow the regular visa application procedures: paying 36,500 Colombian pesos for a pin code at any Colpatria Bank branch, calling the Visa Information Call Center and going to any branch of Banco Union to pay the visa processing fee (equivalent of US \$100.00). The applicant may visit the Embassy for an interview on the assigned date and must present proof of travel plans during the interview.

Vice Consul's Corner—Junior Officer Exchanges



There are many advantages to being a Junior Foreign Service Officer in Bogotá. One of them is simply being in Colombia, with its wonderful traditions, art, music and foods. Another is the Western Hemisphere Affairs Junior Officer Consular Exchange Program, which allows Spanish-speaking posts in Latin America to exchange consular officers for a period of two weeks. If this sounds like a vacation, you are right! But only in the sense that it is a great opportunity to experience a different culture and see how other posts operate.

The program represents a practical, hands-on learning experience for officers to see how other U.S. Missions face the same problems and, more importantly, how they resolve them. "I was able to gain valuable insight to common challenges shared by all Non-Immigrant Visa Units," said an NIV officer just back from a two-week exchange in Buenos Aires, Argentina. "And as a result, I have some ideas to help our section here be even more efficient."

Immersion in another culture is, of course, one of the main attractions of the program. "The first week I was in Buenos Aires, the Latin Music Grammy Awards was taking place in the U.S.," the officer said. "For days we interviewed famous musicians, singers, composers, dancers. It was a view of an important cultural group I wouldn't have seen if I hadn't gone on the exchange program. And it was a lot of fun."

To date, Bogotá has had exchanges with Tegucigalpa, Port of Spain, Buenos Aires, San Salvador and Santo Domingo. In Tegucigalpa, cultural differences were more apparent in the way applicants dressed. Whereas in Colombia, most applicants come to the interview dressed in elegant business clothes, people in Honduras chose very light shirts and casual slacks. "It is very hot and it just makes sense to be more relaxed," says the officer. "Each place is different and it is interesting to be able to see that."

The officer who went to Port of Spain spent a lot of her time interviewing third country nationals on their way to the U.S. on their yachts. She also saw how a small three-team Consular Section operated and compared it to Bogotá, one of the largest in the world. "It gave me a real appreciation of how hard the officers work here," she says. "And what a good job the Section does, given the huge work load."

The exchange program will continue to provide opportunities for officers throughout the hemisphere. Our upcoming exchanges include Santiago, Panama City, La Paz and Caracas.

Immigrant visa unit

National Visa Center



In 1994, the State Department established the National Visa Center (NVC) in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The NVC is located on the site of a former Air Force base. The NVC processes all approved immigrant visa petitions after they are received from the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) and retains them until the cases are ready for adjudication by a consular officer abroad. At any given time, there could be over two million petitions with the NVC. Petitions may remain at the NVC for several weeks or for many years depending on the visa category and country of birth of the visa applicant. When an applicant's case is about to become current (i.e. a visa number is likely to be available within the year) the petition is forwarded to the appropriate U.S. Embassy or Consulate overseas. If an applicant is adjusting status in the U.S. the case will be forwarded to the appropriate BCIS office upon request by that office.

Frequently Asked Questions



Why doesn't the NVC have the case yet?

After a petitioner files a petition with BCIS, and it is approved, BCIS will send the petitioner a Notice of Approval (I-797) and then send the petition to the NVC. There is a delay between when the petitioner receives the Notice of Receipt and the Notice of Approval from BCIS and also between when the petitioner receives the Notice of Approval and when the NVC receives the petition.

After the NVC receives the petition, the NVC will create a case record and assign a case number. The NVC recommends that petitioners wait at least three weeks after receiving the Notice of Approval before calling the NVC if you have not heard from the NVC by that time.

The applicant has received the Instruction Packet.

What should the applicant do now? Procedures vary depending on the kind of visa and which embassy or consulate will be processing the case. Applicants should read carefully and follow the instructions in the information packet sent to them. Jumping steps or sending in information that has not been requested will only delay processing of the case.

When the petitioner filed a petition for a relative, he/she was a legal permanent resident (green card holder). The petitioner recently became a U.S. citizen. How can the petitioner upgrade the petition? Make a copy of your Naturalization Certificate and send the copy - NOT the original - to the NVC with a letter containing the beneficiary name and case number of the petition you want to upgrade. The NVC will send the beneficiary any additional forms and information required.

The petitioner has been waiting for a very long time for a relative to get an immigrant visa. Now there is a family emergency and the relative needs to immigrate soon. Can the NVC help?

Unfortunately, if your relative's case is not current, there is nothing that the NVC can do to expedite visa processing. Immigrant visa processing is governed by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, as amended, which controls visa categories, priority dates and the availability of visa numbers. Immigrant visa numbers are made available strictly in the order of priority dates. There is no provision within the law that would allow the NVC to process the case out of turn.



The applicant went for an interview for an immigrant visa at the U.S. Embassy, but was refused. Can the NVC review this case?

No. The NVC has no authority to review the granting or refusal of any immigrant visa case. The Embassy always explains, verbally and in writing, the legal basis for a refusal. If you want to have more information about the processing of an immigrant visa case that has already been sent to a U.S. consular section abroad or to request a review of a visa refusal, please contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate where the visa case was processed.

Answers to commonly asked questions about the NVC are available through an automated e-mail response system at NVCA@state.gov. In addition, you may read more about this process on the NVC website <http://travel.state.gov/nvc.html>.

Fraud prevention unit

Anti-Fraud Working Group Grows, Shares Info with Other Embassies



Bogotá's Anti-Fraud Working Group, which the U.S. Embassy founded one year ago, has grown to 22 members. The group is composed of representatives from Embassies in Bogotá, and is aimed at sharing information on fraud detection and fraud trends. The most recent meeting took place on September 4, and included representatives from Canada, Mexico, most of the Central American and Andean countries, Brazil, Jamaica, and ten European countries, including Spain and Russia.

The Anti-Fraud Working Group demonstrated a concern

regarding the high rate of fraudulent documents submitted by visa applicants, and about the possibility that tourist visa recipients may overstay their visas and remain permanently in the countries they visit. Several Central American Embassies have also noted that some citizens have been able to use easily forged civil documents to obtain an apparently legitimate passport. At the group's most recent meeting, hosted by the Embassy of Japan, members discussed the loss or theft of some 200 Japanese passports each year. Many of these lost and stolen passports are used by Chinese national imposters for travel to European countries whose immigration inspectors are unused to seeing many Asian travelers.

We hope to encourage the further growth of the working group by organizing more formal presentations on topics of concern to members, such as the role of biometric indicators in visa security.

American citizen services Unit

A Reminder for Colombian-American Dual Citizens



Colombia has recently begun enforcing an old law that requires all Colombian citizens to enter and leave Colombia using a Colombian passport. While this law has been on the books since 1993, it was not usually enforced. However, the American Citizens Services Unit has been hearing from Colombian-American dual citizens, reporting that they were required by Colombian immigration officials to use their Colombian passport traveling into or out of Colombia.

According to Colombian Law 43, any person born in Colombia must use their Colombian passport to enter and leave Colombia, even if they are also a citizen of another country. Therefore, if you are a Colombian-American citizen planning a trip to Colombia in the near future, you should be prepared to carry your Colombian passport as well as your U.S. passport on your trip.

We note that the United States similarly requires that U.S. citizens, regardless of any other nationality they may hold, must enter and depart the United States on their U.S. passport. This does not effect your entitlement to American Citizen Services from the U.S. Embassy in any way, nor will it affect your status as a U.S. Citizen. As long as you choose to remain a Colombian citizen, however, you must adhere to the Colombian law.

Are you an American citizen or resident living or traveling abroad? Are your friends or family members concerned about your well-being and safety? Here are some options you can pass on to them for up-to-date information, so they can rest a little easier, or so you too are aware of current events around you:

- <http://travel.state.gov/> (maintained by the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs)
- <http://usembassy.state.gov/colombia> (maintained by the U.S. Embassy Bogotá)
- www.ready.gov (maintained by the Department of Homeland Security)
- Overseas Citizen Services Call Center: 1-888-407-4747 (toll-free in the U.S.) or 317-472-2328 (from outside the U.S.).

U.S. Citizen Registration Drive

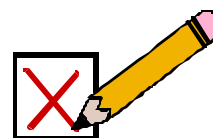
It has been several years since we last updated our database of American citizens in Colombia who have registered with the Embassy. With the passage of time, this database becomes increasingly inaccurate, as registered Americans depart Colombia without informing us, and other Americans arrive without registering. In order to serve the American community in Colombia as efficiently as possible, we are requesting that all American citizens in Colombia, who have not registered with the American Citizen Services Unit since August 1, 2002, please do so at this time. Registrations submitted prior to that date will be purged from the database in the coming weeks.

The best way to register with us is to obtain and complete a registration form and a Privacy Act waiver form, and then mail, fax or bring them to the American Citizen Services Unit. We have these forms on hand in the unit, and they may be picked up during normal service hours, Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon. When submitting these documents please also provide a photocopy of the identification page of your U.S. passport, as well as those of any American citizen family members residing with you in Colombia, as evidence of U.S. citizenship.

Blank forms may also be obtained at our website, <http://usembassy.state.gov/colombia>. Follow the links to "Consular", "ACS" and "Registration Services". The forms may be completed and submitted electronically at the website, but as this method does not permit submission of proof of citizenship, it is preferable to print out the forms, complete them by hand and submit them by mail, fax or in person, along with photocopies of your passport ID page and those of any family members.

Our fax number in Bogotá is 1-315-2196 (within Colombia). Our mailing address is:

Servicios para Ciudadanos Norteamericanos
Embajada de los Estados Unidos
Calle 22D Bis, No. 47-51
Bogotá



American citizens on temporary visits to Colombia are also encouraged to register with the Embassy. For all registrants, it is important to include on the form, in the space provided, your estimated date of departure from Colombia.

Thank you for taking the time to register with the Embassy. By doing so you make it easier for us to assist you in the future.

How to Contact the Consular Section

All visa, fraud and ACS information can be accessed on our web page at <http://usembassy.state.gov/colombia>.

Non-immigrant visa information is available on this website and includes information about visas, supporting documents, how to schedule an appointment, stolen/lost passports, and forms.

If users need additional general information or to schedule an appointment, they may call the call center (Visa Information Call Center). They do this by obtaining a PIN code at any Colpatria bank, and then calling the call center at 01-8000-12-32-32. People requesting early appointments should call the call center as well. Callers from the United States may dial 1-800-368-0360. A credit card access fee for the US-based number will be charged. From within Bogotá, you may dial 346-9150. The Call Center does not provide case specific information.

There is no formal appeal process for visas which have been refused after an interview with a Consular Officer. A Supervisory Consular Officer reviews every refusal. Applicants may reapply following the normal application procedures. We however do not encourage applicants to do so unless there have been significant changes in their economic and/or



professional situations, or they are better able to demonstrate their bona-fides for non immigrant visa issuance. We do not accept any documents prior to an interview, nor can we accept third party inquiries. U.S. Congressional interests only should send inquiries to ConsularBogota@state.gov.

Information regarding **immigrant visas** can be obtained by phone at 571-315-1566 between 3:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. on Tuesdays. Priority dates for all immigrant visas are listed at http://travel.state.gov/visa_bulletin.html. The e-mail address is IVBogota@state.gov.

Our **Fraud Prevention Unit** can be reached by telephone at 571-315-2497. No visa questions will be answered at this number.

American Citizens Services questions should be e-mailed to acs_bogota@state.gov. No visa questions will be answered at this address. All information regarding passports and consular certification of birth can be found on our web site at <http://usembassy.state.gov/colombia/> and ACS/Visas. Travel advisories published by the U.S. Department of State can be found at <http://travel.state.gov/crisis1.html>.

Community News: Consular Officers Support Local Animal Shelter



The Consul General and other Embassy members recently visited the Asociación Defensora de Animales y del Ambiente (ADA). The volunteers were given donations from various individuals from the Consular Section, which provided the animals with food and treats. The dogs and cats eagerly accepted the treats and attention from the volunteers. "Adopting a puppy from the ADA was one of the best decisions I have made. My dog has brought a lot of joy into my life" explained a Consular Officer. There are two ADA shelters located in Bogotá with approximately 300 dogs and cats. If you are interested in finding out more information on the ADA or on how to adopt a pet, please check their website, www.encolombia.com/veterinarias/ada.htm.

